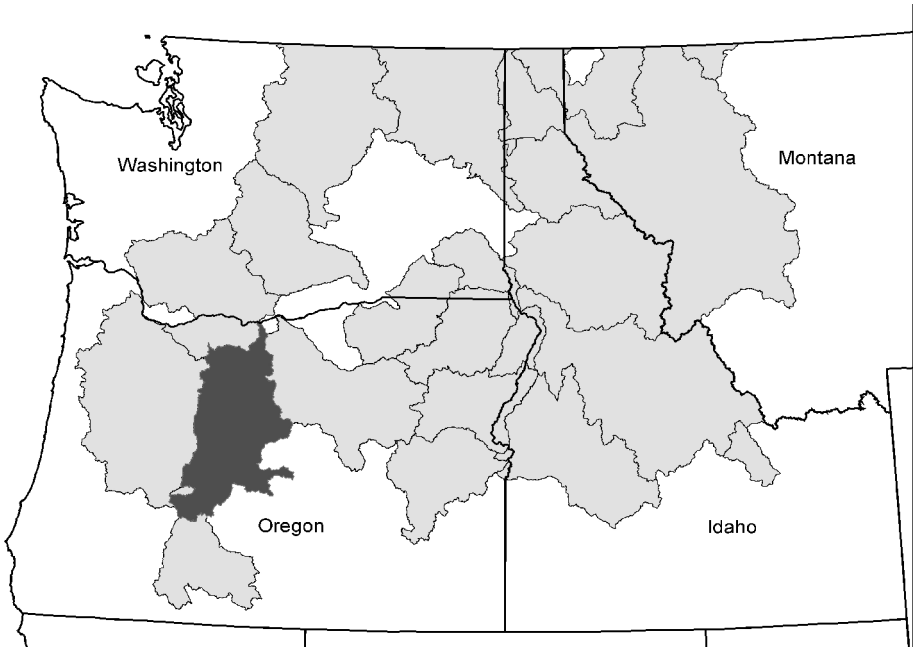
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bull Trout Draft Recovery Plan

and proposed Critical Habitat

Deschutes River Recovery Unit

(CHAPTER 7)



What areas are included in the Deschutes Recovery Unit?

The Deschutes Recovery Unit encompasses the entire Deschutes River basin and its tributaries, except for Odell Lake, which is its' own recovery unit. It is located in central Oregon and drains an area of approximately 10,937 square miles and the mainstem Deschutes River is approximately 251 miles in length from the headwaters to the confluence with the Columbia River. The primary tributaries include the Little Deschutes, Crooked, Metolius, Warm Springs, and White rivers, and Shitike and Trout creeks.

How much of the area is proposed as critical habitat?

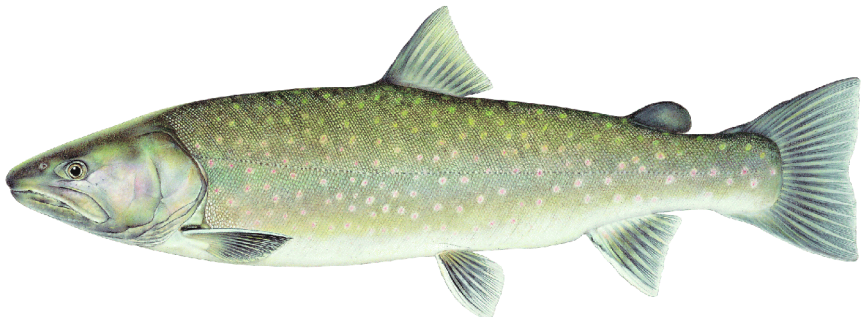
Two critical habitat subunits are proposed for the Deschutes River basin. They total about 498 miles of streams and 23,314 acres of lake/reservoir habitat. One proposed critical habitat unit is the lower Deschutes River core area; the other is the currently unoccupied upper Deschutes River core habitat. The two areas are separated by Big Falls, a natural impassable barrier on the Deschutes River. The total proposed areas are only 6 percent of the total recovery unit.

Who developed the draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal?

The draft recovery plan for bull trout was developed through the collaboration of Federal, State, Tribal and private biologists working with representatives of local watersheds, private landowners and industry and conservation organizations. A total of 24 local recovery unit teams contributed to the development of the draft recovery plans for each of the recovery units. These recovery unit teams included experts in biology, hydrology and forestry, as well as natural resource users and stakeholders with interest and knowledge of bull trout and the habitats they depend on for survival. The critical habitat proposal was based in large part on information on the current distribution and habitat characteristics of the species.

What is the relationship between the draft recovery plan and the critical habitat proposal?

The draft recovery and critical habitat proposal are closely linked. The information developed by the recovery unit teams, and the science underlying that information, are the basis for the critical habitat proposals. However, critical habitat is designed to provide for the conservation of the species by identifying those areas essential for conservation and requiring special management, whereas a recovery plan is a much larger blueprint providing guidance for the eventual recovery and de-listing of a species.



Who would be affected by recovery efforts and a critical habitat designation?

A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority. It is the Fish and Wildlife Service's estimation of the actions necessary for the recovery of the species. Agencies, communities or individuals are encouraged to take voluntary actions described in the recovery plan to benefit bull trout.

Federal agencies are required to consult with the Fish and Wildilfe Service on actions they carry out, fund, or authorize that might affect critical habitat. It is important to note that in most cases, this is already occurring under the section 7 interagency consultation requirements of the Endangered Species Act. Non-Federal entities, including private landowners, that may also be affected could include, for example, those seeking a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit under the Clean Water Act to build an in-water structure, those seeking Federal approval to discharge effluent into the aquatic environment, or those seeking Federal funding to implement private property improvements, where such actions affect the aquatic environment that has been designated as critical habitat. But again, in most cases where this link between activities on private lands and Federal funding, permitting, or authorization exists, consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act is already occurring.

A critical habitat designation does not have any effect on non-Federal entities when there is not a Federal nexus. For example, swimming, boating, fishing, farming, ranching, or any of a range of activities normally conducted by a landowner or operator of a business not involving Federal funding, permitting, or authorization in order to occur would not be affected.

How was the draft recovery plan for each unit developed?

Recovery units were delineated based on the biology of the species and considerations for paralleling existing state conservation and fisheries management frameworks wherever possible. Recovery teams incorporated existing state conservation processes to the degree possible, depending on the degree to which they had been developed (for example, the Montana Bull Trout Restoration Plan, the State of Idaho's Bull Trout Conservation Plan, the State of Washington's Statewide Strategy to Recover Salmon and the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds).

What is the status of bull trout in the Deschutes Recovery Unit?

Historically bull trout were distributed throughout the Deschutes River basin from the headwaters and headwater lakes to the Columbia River,

which allowed access to the Columbia River for juvenile rearing and adult foraging. Pelton Round Butte Project dams on the Deschutes River and Big Falls, a natural barrier, isolate the local populations. Bull trout no longer occur in the upper Deschutes above Big Falls Bull trout except for Odell Lake, (see Odell Lake Recovery Unit, Chapter 8) which is isolated from other bull trout in the basin by a lava flow that dammed Odell Creek about 5,000 years ago. The five local populations in the lower Deschutes core area are in Shitike Creek, the Warm Springs River and the three Metolius river population complexes.

What are the threats to bull trout in the Deschutes Recovery Unit?

Land and water management activities that currently depress bull trout populations and degrade habitat in this recovery unit include operation and maintenance of dams and other diversion structures, stream habitat alterations, and brook trout. Impassable dams and diversion structures isolate and fragment bull trout local populations. Introduced brook trout threaten bull trout through hybridization, competition, and possible predation.

What are the recovery goals and objectives?

The goal of the bull trout recovery plan is to ensure the long-term persistence of self-sustaining complex interacting groups of bull trout distributed throughout the species' native range, so that the species can be delisted. To achieve this goal the following objectives have been identified for bull trout in the Deschutes Recovery Unit:

* Maintain current distribution of bull trout within the lower Deschutes Core area and restore distribution in previously occupied areas within the Deschutes Recovery Unit.

* Maintain stable or increasing trends in abundance of adult bull trout.

* Restore and maintain suitable habitat conditions for all bull trout life history stages and strategies.

* Conserve genetic diversity and provide opportunity for genetic exchange.

What are the criteria for measuring recovery?

Recovery will be measured according to four criteria: distribution, abundance, population trends and connectivity in the watershed. The recovery plan includes specific, quantifiable standards for each of these criteria. Bull trout are distributed among five or more local populations in the Deschutes Recovery Unit, with five or more local populations in the lower Deschutes Core Area. Estimated abundance of adult bull trout is 1,500 to 3,000 or more individuals in the recovery unit, distributed in the lower Deschutes Core Area. Adult bull trout exhibit stable or increasing trends in abundance in the recovery unit; based on a minimum of 10 years of monitoring data. Connectivity criteria will be met when migratory forms are present in all local populations, with intact migratory corridors among all local populations in core areas providing opportunity for genetic exchange and diversity.

What actions will be necessary to recover bull trout in the Deschutes Recovery Unit?

Recommended recovery efforts generally consists of enhancing habitat, eliminating or modifying barriers and removing non-native species. Actions include improving riparian areas, and addressing upstream and downstream passage at various dams. More details are available in the full text of the Bull Trout Draft Recovery Plan, Deschutes River Recovery Unit, Chapter 7.

How long will recovery take?

Time required to achieve recovery depends on bull trout status, factors affecting bull trout, implementation and effectiveness of recovery tasks, and responses to recovery tasks. Three to five bull trout generations (15 to 25 years), or possible longer, may be necessary before identified threats to the species can be significantly reduced and bull trout can be considered eligible for delisting.

How much will recovery cost?

Total estimated cost of bull trout recovery in the Deschutes Recovery Unit is estimated at $2.1 million spread over a 25-year recovery period. Total cost includes estimates of expenditures by local, Tribal, State, and Federal governments and by private businesses and individuals. Cost estimates are not provided for tasks which are normal agency responsibilities under existing authorities.

How can I obtain copies of the documents?

The documents, along with maps, fact sheets, photographs and other materials may be found on the Pacific Region's website at www.species.fws.gov/bulltrout.

How can I comment?

The Service will be accepting comments, beginning November 29, 2002, on its draft recovery plan for bull trout in the Columbia and Klamath river basins and in the St. Mary-Belly River Basin in Montana.

Comments on the draft recovery plan will be accepted for 90 days, until February 27, 2003. Comments on the draft recovery plan may be mailed to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, ID 83709; faxed to 208-378-5262, or sent via e-mail to: fw1srbocomment@fws.gov

Beginning November 29, 2002, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will accept comments from the public on the agency's proposal to designate critical habitat for the Columbia River and Klamath River distinct population segments of bull trout.

Comments will be accepted for 60 days, until January 28, 2003. Comments on the critical habitat proposal may be submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Regional Office, attn: John Young, Bull Trout Coordinator, 911 N.E. 11th Avenue, Portland Oregon 97232; faxed to 503.231.6243 or e-mailed to: R1bulltroutCH@r1.fws.gov .

A public information meeting and hearing are scheduled in Eugene, OR at the Hilton Eugene & Conference Center, 66 East 6th Ave on January 14. The information meeting will be from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. The formal public hearing will be from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

This is only a brief summary.

Please see full draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal for complete details.